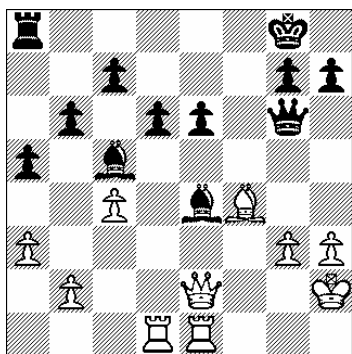


## SHOTS BEFORE YOUR EYES

By Bob Basalla

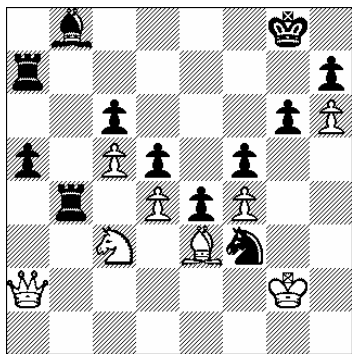
At any moment in your chess game it may happen. You may have a chance to gain the advantage or even win the game with a little tactic. True enough, some shots you may already have had in mind when you set them up. Other times things just “kind-a sort-a” happen and you get an opportunity out of the blue. In either case you must be alert and ready for action. You can win a lot of games just by being awake each and every move. It happens all the time, from the lowest to the very highest levels. As proof, let me once again provide some examples from my own games, not that they are any more or less instructive than a grandmaster’s games or your games. It’s just the material I have at hand, and besides, I know what one of the players was thinking!

Lets start off with the following position:



This is from the 1986 Ohio Chess Congress. I have white, and after a hairy opening I finally may be making a little progress, figuring to trade queens while winning the king pawn after the black bishop on e4 moves away from my attack. Even then it would not be so easy to win with black’s bishops raking the board. He tries to escape by a counter attack but that only works for one move: **1...Be4-c2 2.Rd1-d2**. Now my opponent plays **2...Bc2-b3** to grab my bishop pawn if I go through with my plan of **3.Qe2xe6+ Qg6xe6 4.Re1xe6**. Unfortunately for him this plan falls victim to a little tactic. Do you see it? I played **3.Qe2-f3** and won the game then and there as I have a long range fork attack on the black bishop on b3 and his loose rook on a8.

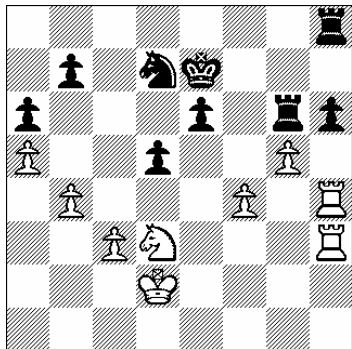
That was pretty simple. Let’s look at a trickier one from a 1988 Parma Chess Club Round Robin. This time I have black:



Here I have two rooks for my queen, and in time pressure for both sides I have picked up a couple of pawns and got my knight to a dominating post on f3. But here, too, a win could be a ways off, depending on how well I can advance my passed queen rook pawn while avoiding any shots by white. In fact in our starting position white is looking for a shot of his own, threatening to capture on d5 with his knight and crash through with his queen toward my exposed king, a nasty thing to deal with at any time, but even more so when short of time. I was paying attention however, and blocked his threat while setting a sneaky trap of my own.

I played **1...Rb4-c4** and figured he would guard his horse by **2.Qa2-b2** or **2.Qa2-b3**, in both cases attacking my bishop, which I would then save with **2...Bb8-c7**. Then I would be ready to start pushing my rook pawn. Instead white played to block my passer by **2.Nc3-a4**, a perfectly reasonable idea which unfortunately fails to a tactic I had noticed (even in time pressure, remember) the move before. I won immediately by **2...Rc4-c2+! 3.Qa2xc2 Nf3-e1+ 4.Kg2-f2 Ne1xc2**. That’s a little bit of geometry worth remembering!

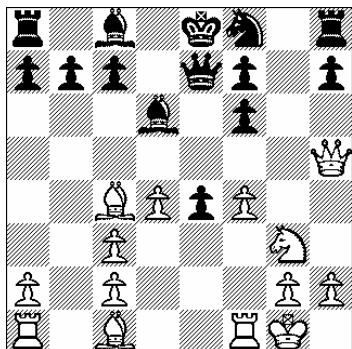
Here is another geometry lesson from the state team championship in 1998. I (white) needed to win this game for our team to win the match. For a long time it didn't look like it was going to happen. But I kept playing on, hoping that something would turn up. Luckily for me, it did:



It was my move so I won the pawn at hand, not very sure that it would be enough to win the game. But since it was the only try I had...

**1.Rh4xh6**, and here black should trade at least one and probably both rooks, then rush over to grab the passer, hoping that I can't get something done on the other side of the board in the meantime. Instead he mistakenly elected to guard his rooks by **1...Rh8-g8**. Now, without any more prompting, can you see the winning sequence? Remember the hint: geometry. For those of you too hot (or too lazy?) for the answer, I won the game by **2.Rh6xg6 Rg8xg6 3.Rh3-h7+ Ke7-d6 4.Rh7xd7+** and black resigned as after **4...Kd6xd7 5.Nd3-e5+** and **6.Ne5xg6** I'm the only one left with a piece to my name.

Now, just because a nice little tactic happens in some game doesn't mean that another trick might not come up in the same contest. That is why you should stay alert for every move of every game. (Of course, none of us is perfect, and we'll all have times when we miss stuff. But if you are going to improve as a chess player, you should not accept that as an excuse.) The game of mine that best demonstrates this (that I can find in my files!) is from the 1978 Columbus Turkey Open. I admit that my opponent was not very strong, and the game was pretty much a rout, but the nice little tricks kept happening every few moves. We'll check in at this starting position:



With white and the move there would be nothing wrong with the simple **1.Rf1-e1** as the overextended black king pawn, played there in a desperate bid to keep the position closed, cannot be defended. But I have an even more forceful way to proceed: **1.Ng3xe4!** because if **1...Qe7xe4**, white gets back the invested material with interest by **2.Qh5xf7+ Ke8-d8 3.Qf7xf6+** and **4.Qf6xh8**. Black tried to cover up with **1...Bc8-e6** but after **2.Bc4xe6 Nf8xe6** I snag a second pawn with **3.Qh5-b5+**, even after he seemingly defends it by **3...Pc7-c6**. One way to exploit the overloaded defending black queen would be the simple **4.Ne4xd6+ Qe7xd6 5.Qb5xb7**, but once again I have an even neater way to do it.

Did you see **4.Qb5xb7!**, for if **4...Qe7xb7 5.Ne4xd6+** and **6.Nd6xb7** picking up a piece. So black once again concedes the point and plays **4...0-0 5.Qb7xc6 Bd6-c7**. One trick leads to another. The next one is **6.Pf4-f5 Rf8-c8** (threatening **...Bc7xh2+** winning white's queen. Stay alert!) **7.Qc6-a6 Ne6-g7 8.Ne4xf6+ Kg8-h8 9.Bc1-g5 Bc7-b6** (a shell-shocked black doesn't seem like he even wants to avoid these shots any more. The game concluded thus) **10.Qa6-d3 Rc8-c6 11.Nf6xh7 Qe7-c7 12.Nh7-f6 Rc6xc3 13.Qd3-e4** (Forking the rook on a8 and the fatal checking square on h4) **13...Bb6xd4+ 14.Qe4xd4 Qc7-c5 15.Bg5-e3 Qc5xd4 16.Be3xd4** (The shots keep on coming!) **16...Rc3-c4 17.Pc2-c3 Ra8-d8 18.Rf1-f4** and black finally gave up. A very enjoyable game, even if it was a massacre. (Does that make me a bad person?)